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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to use the SCANS (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) employability skills to identify the criteria used for hiring and employment retention by companies in Southeastern Pennsylvania. Results were intended to help personnel development and training institutions in the region align their training outcomes and human resource development curricula with the hiring and employment needs of industries in the region. A survey instrument was created and mailed to 559 companies, with 67 returns (12 percent). Factor analysis yielded eight components that were used to identify competencies that are essential in employment decisions. The study found that the majority of the staff who make hiring and employment decisions are not human resources development staff. The study also found that three elements--the hiring decision maker, the candidate's ability to organize resources, and the candidate's skills in human relations, predominate in hiring and postemployment decisions. The study also validated the idea that there are identifiable skills that can constitute competencies for preparing the work force to meet the needs of business and industry. The study suggested that it may be necessary to provide training in evaluating employees for staff who make hiring decisions and training to help work force development practitioners incorporate the appropriate elements in their curriculum for work force preparation. (Contains 13 references.) (KC)

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EMPLOYMENT ASSESSMENT PRACTICES: IMPLICATIONS FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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EMPLOYMENT ASSESSMENT PRACTICES: IMPLICATIONS FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Introduction

In 1991 the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) recommended a set of competencies and skills that would help job seekers secure and retain employment. Three years later, the Federal government enacted the School-to-Work Opportunities Act to facilitate the transition from school to work. In the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Governor noted that to meet the challenges of the 21st Century the state must have a well-educated, trained and motivated work force. Businesses in the state have embraced the Governor's call and formed partnerships across county boundaries to address common workforce issues. In Southeastern Pennsylvania, leading economic development organizations such as the Strategy 21 partnership of regional organizations and Greater Philadelphia First member organizations have teamed up for a similar purpose. Working with the Pennsylvania Economy League the team hopes to develop for the region a workforce development system that offers a cutting-edge labor pool of sufficient quality and size to meet the demands of globally competitive businesses. Despite these exemplary efforts to meet the workforce needs of business and industry, there is the perception that the available workforce is not adequately prepared for employment.

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to use the SCANS' employability skills to identify the criteria used for hiring and employment retention by companies in Southeastern Pennsylvania, so that personnel development and training institutions in the region can align their training outcomes and human resource development curricula with the hiring and employment needs of industries in the region.

Assumptions

- There are two components of necessary work skills, technical and nontechnical.
- There is no doubt about the importance of the technical skills in hiring and employment decision making.
- Employers'complaints about job seekers' unpreparedness for the workplace is more about their lack of nontechnical skills than it is of the technical skills.

Work Force[1]: Southeastern Pennsylvania
September 1997

- Civilian Work Force - 2,503,400
  Employment - 2,380,100
  Unemployment - 123,300

- Rate of Unemployment

  Pennsylvania State - 5.3%

  Southeastern region - 4.9%

  Bucks county - 4.3%
  Chester county - 3.2%
  Delaware county - 4.6%
  Montgomery county - 3.9%
  Philadelphia - 7.5%

1. Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry, Bureau of Research and Statistics: Pennsylvania Labor Force, November 1997.

Methods

- The SCANS' workplace competencies and foundation skills were expanded into a survey instrument.
- 32 separate skills were identified.
- 559 companies were mailed the survey instrument, and 67/559 or 12% returned usable data.
- The data were factor analyzed and 8 components were derived. See Table 1.
- The factor components were used to identify competencies that are essential in employment decisions.

Table 1. Similarities between Factor Components and SCANS' Employability Skills.

FACTOR COMPONENTS	SCANS' SKILLS
Organizational skills	Resources
Dependability	Personal quality
Basic academic skills	Basic skills
Problem-solving skills	Thinking skills
Human Relations	Interpersonal skills
* Analytical skills	* Systems skills
Communication skills	Information skills
Technology skills	Technology

Findings

- 1 situational variable, title, i.e. the individual responsible for making the hiring decision, appears to have a significant but inverse relation with hiring and post-employment retention decision. See Table 2.

- 2 factor components, "organizational ability" and "human relations", show a significant relation with hiring and post-employment retention decisions. See Table 2.

Table 2. Significant Hiring and Post-Employment Decision-Making Considerations

	Hiring Stage	Employment Stage	
Factor	r	r	Significance Level
Decision Maker	-.47	-.47	.01**
Organizational Ability	.57	.57	.01**
Human Relations	.35	.35	.05*

$p < .01$** $p < .05$*

- Respondents also mentioned appearance, impression, comportment, temperament, maturity, stability, perseverance and safety consciousness as additional skills necessary for securing and holding employment.

- Respondents identified 12 of the initial variables as crucial skills for developing competencies for preparing potential job seekers. See Figure 1.

- Companies reported their location as:
  urban - 20.9% or 14/67 companies;
  suburban - 61.2% or 41/67 companies;
  rural - 17.9% or 12/67 companies.

- Hiring and post-employment decisions are made by:
  CEO/Owner - 43.3% or 29/67 companies;
  HRD staff - 23.9% or 16/67 companies;
  Other - 32.8% or 22/67 companies.

  Other decision makers include Production Manager, Controller, Service Manager, Transport Manager, etc.

- The large majority of the companies surveyed, 95.5% or 64/67, have been doing business for more than 10 years.

- The majority of the companies employ between 11 and 250 workers. See Table 3.

- Most of the companies anticipate hiring between 11 and 250 workers during the next 3 years. See Table 4.

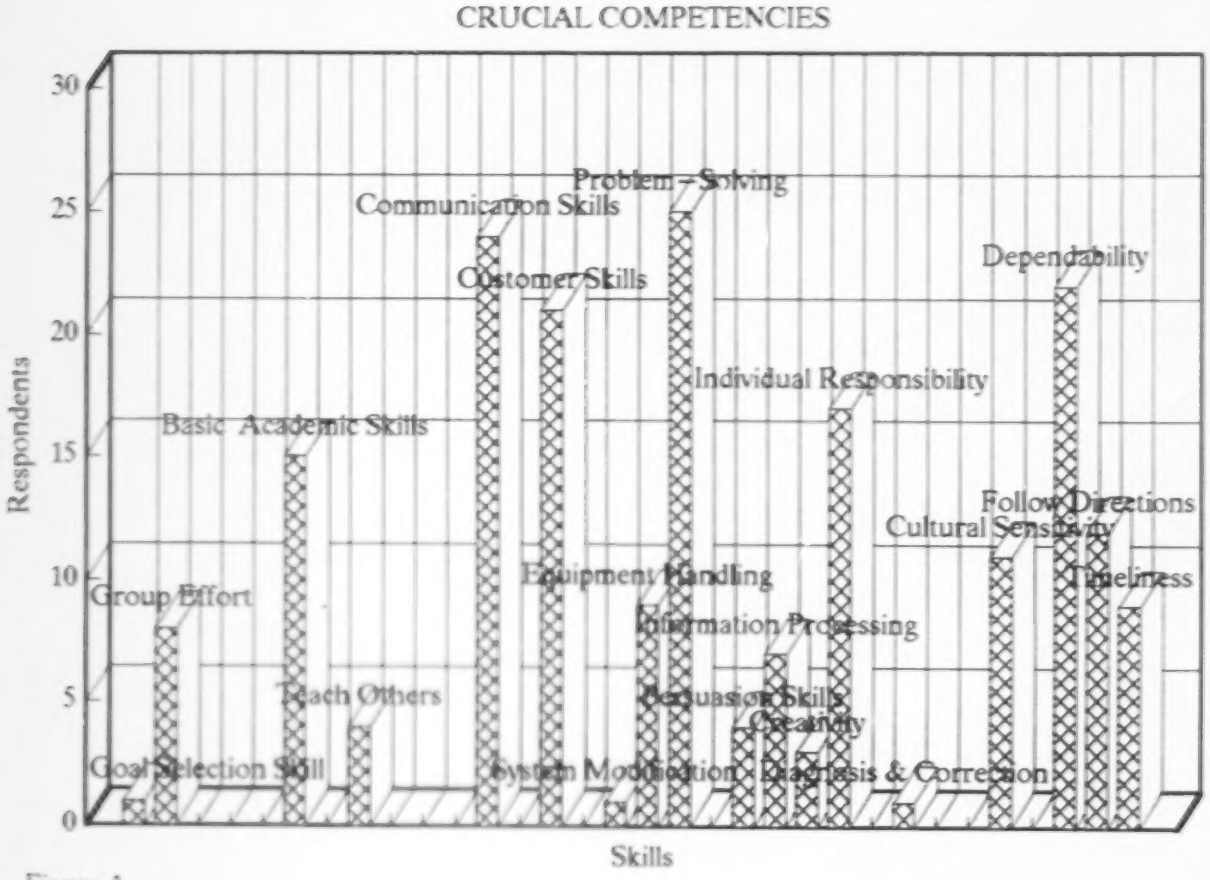
CRUCIAL COMPETENCIES
Respondents
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
Problem – Solving
Communication Skills
Customer Skills
Dependability
Individual Responsibility
Basic Academic Skills
Follow Directions
Cultural Sensitivity
Timeliness
Equipment Handling
Group Effort
Information Processing
Teach Others
Persuasion Skills
Creativity
Goal Selection Skill
System Modification
Diagnosis & Correction
Skills

Figure 1.

Table 3. Company Size by Level of Employment

Level of Employees	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
1-10	9	13.4	13.4
11-20	17	25.4	38.8
21-50	20	29.9	68.7
51-100	11	16.4	85.1
101-250	9	13.4	98.5
251-500	1	1.5	100.0

Total N = 67.

Table 4. Three-Year Employment Projection

Level of Employees	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
1-10	19	28.4	28.4
11-25	15	22.4	50.7
26-50	13	19.4	70.1
51-100	8	11.9	82.1
101-250	11	16.4	98.5
251-500	1	1.5	100.0

Total N = 67.

Conclusions

- The majority of the staff who make hiring and employment decisions, 76.1%, are not HRD staff.

- Three elements, the hiring decision maker, the ability to organize resources and skills in human relations, are prevalent in hiring and post-employment decisions.

- Certainly, there are identifiable skills that can constitute competencies for preparing the workforce to meet the needs of business and industry.

Implications for Workforce Development

- First, given that the majority of the staff who make hiring and post-employment decisions are not HRD staff, perhaps, they may lack the skills necessary to assess job seekers and evaluate them effectively after they are hired. Therefore, it may be necessary to provide the staff who make such decisions the relevant information and training to function efficiently as employee evaluators. This will require the development of an appropriate training protocol that incorporates the essential elements for assessing candidates for employment.

- Second, since there are identifiable factors that influence hiring and retention decisions, those responsible for human resource and workforce development must focus on providing new workers and students the appropriate skills to assure their employment and success on the job. Trainers and human resource developers must continually search for the factors that affect employment decision so that they can incorporate them in their training program.

Limitations

- The focus of the study was on the small manufacturing industry only.

- The number of companies that participated in the study was small.

- No distinction was made between decisions affecting employees in different occupations such as clerical personnel, health care practitioners or construction workers.

Recommendations

- There are identifiable elements that influence employment decisions. Therefore, to enhance the employment opportunities of their clients workforce development practitioners must incorporate the appropriate elements in their curriculum for workforce preparation.

- The limited scope of the present study on manufacturing requires that there be a follow-up investigation involving more industries and a larger number of participants in order to validate the findings of the study.

- The respondents identified additional skills for employment and it is recommended that the relationship between the additional skills and employment decisions be studied further.

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